









Biographical sketch of
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Major William H. Mall,
of the 8th Illinois Cavalry
who fell in the pursuit of the
Battle of Gettysburg.

(From the Portrait and Biographical
History)

Chicago

Wm. H. Mall, 1864

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MAJOR MEDILL.

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Major WILLIAM H. MEDILL, of the 8th Illinois Cavalry, mortally wounded in pursuing the rebels after the battle of Gettysburg, was born in Massillon, Ohio, on the 5th of November, 1835. In the spring of 1838, the family removed to a farm in Pike township, Stark county, Ohio, where he remained on his father's farm until he was fifteen years old, when, in 1850, he went to Coshocton, Ohio, and commenced learning the printing business in the office of the Coshocton *Republican*. In April, 1852, he removed to Cleveland, Ohio, where he took a situation as a compositor on his brother Joseph's paper, the *Forest City*—afterwards called the *Leader*. At the end of six months, he took the foremanship of the *Leader*, which situation he held until the fall of 1855, when he removed to Chicago, where he joined his brother James in publishing the *Prairie Farmer*. In the fall of 1858, he disposed of his interest in the *Prairie Farmer*, and went to Canton, Ohio, where he established the *Stark County Republican*. He worked hard and faithfully to get his new paper on a paying footing; but his means were limited; the receipts at first were small, and the cash outlay considerable; the promises made to him at the outset, by politicians, were not fulfilled, and after six months' effort, not realizing the success he anticipated, he sold the paper and returned to Chicago. During the short period he owned the *Republican*, it was a pungent and attractive sheet, handsomely printed, and filled with interesting matter. In politics, like its proprietor, it was radical Republican.

On his return to Chicago he obtained a situation as a compositor on the *Daily Tribune*, of which his brother Joseph was part owner and editor, and worked at the case from the spring of 1859 until the breaking out of the Slaveholders' Great Rebellion in the spring of 1861. During this period he spent his leisure hours in storing his mind with useful information. He

read history, reviewed his elementary studies, and when the war broke out, was spending his evenings in the Commercial College of Bryant & Stratton, and in the lyceum of the "Young Men's Literary Union," of which he was a zealous and popular member. During his boyhood years his education had been neglected, and now when he was arrived at manhood, he perceived the imperative necessity of making up for lost time and preparing himself for future usefulness. He desired to be an editor of a successful daily paper, and with this object in view, was industriously fitting himself for the responsibilities of that calling when the news was flashed to Chicago on the night of the 14th of April, 1861, that the rebels of South Carolina had fired on the United States' fort, Sumter, and had bombarded its heroic handful of defenders into surrender. He declared, on the instant of the arrival of the sad intelligence, that he would volunteer on the first call for men to help revenge the insult to the National flag and to crush the parricides that had lifted their daggers against the life of the Great Republic. He had watched and studied the gathering storm of rebellion for months, and had come deliberately to the conclusion that there was but one way to deal with the insurgents, and that was to grapple them and crush them by military power. He contended that there was no other possible cure for the disease, save sabre, grape and bayonets.

The news of the capture of Fort Sumter was published in Chicago on the 15th of April. A meeting of young men of the Literary Union was called to assemble at Bryant & Stratton's Commercial Rooms on the evening of the 17th. Several brief speeches were made; one of them by Major Medill, in which he set forth the cause of the Rebellion and its cure, and pledged himself to join the first military company that might be raised, as a private soldier, in obedience to the promptings of patriotic duty. A muster roll was presented, when sixty young men—himself included—put down their names. On the next day he joined the Barker Dragoons, and soon after found himself doing picket and other duty at Camp Defiance, Cairo, where the company remained for six weeks. On the 1st of June, Gen. McClellan, then recently appointed to command, visited Cairo

to inspect the troops and fortifications. He was so much pleased with Barker's Chicago Dragoons, that he immediately adopted them as his body guards, and ordered them to join him at Clarksburg, Va., which they did the week after. For the next two months, the Chicago Dragoons were actively engaged in contests with the rebels. First there was a brisk skirmish at Philippi; next a fight at Buckhannon; then came a hard fight at Rich Mountain, July 8th. On the 11th was the battle near Beverly, in which the rebels were routed, losing 200 killed and wounded, and leaving 300 prisoners, several pieces of artillery and all their baggage in the hands of the Federal troops. In this battle the Chicago Dragoons dismounted and fought as sharpshooters, doing considerable execution with their revolving carbines. Private Medill distinguished himself for dash and daring. When the order to charge was given, he was among the foremost of his company to open the attack on the enemy. The fighting was done Indian fashion—every trooper took shelter behind a tree or log, and dodged forward from one to the other. In this encounter Private Medill became engaged with a Georgian lieutenant. Each was behind a small tree about sixty yards apart. The rebel fired first, but missed his aim. Medill raised his carbine and fired, but hit the sapling behind which the rebel stood partly concealed; he then sprang forward, calling on the rebel to surrender or he would let daylight through him. The officer threw down his gun and handed his sword to his captor, who marched him to the rear, feeling proud of the achievement. The sword he brought home as a trophy, and it is now in possession of his brother Joseph. After the battle of Beverly, the Chicago Dragoons joined the pursuit, and helped to give the finishing blow to the enemy at Carrick's Ford, where the rebel Gen. Garnett was killed and 1200 prisoners taken. The remnants of the enemy's force fled over the Greenbrier Mountains, vigorously pursued for considerable distance by our troops. The last seen of them they were double-quicking it towards Staunton. In a letter, dated Beverly, July 16th, he complains that the army had ceased its pursuit.

We are 12,500 strong, (he writes,) with five batteries of flying artillery. The rebs. are utterly demoralized. McClellan ought to pursue them to Staun-

ton, and then make a forced march on Richmond, which we could easily capture and hold by the aid of the fleet. It would take us but a week. The country is full of provisions, and most of the way, the road is good and easy to travel. Now is the time to strike vigorously at the secessionists. If I commanded this army, the pursuit would certainly be made. I like our General, but I think he is too cautious ; he lacks boldness and enterprise.

Though but a private soldier and little skilled in military tactics, he exhibited foresight and daring—essential qualities for an officer, and with the history of the campaigns in Eastern Virginia before the reader, few will deny but that his suggestions were feasible.

On the 10th of August, the Chicago Dragoons, having served a month over their time, returned home and were mustered out of service. After a fortnight's rest and recreation, he resolved to re-enter the service of his country for three years or during the war ; not that he liked military life, but from the promptings of patriotic duty. On the 24th of August, 1861, he applied to Gen. Farnsworth for permission to recruit a company for the afterwards famous 8th Illinois Cavalry, which, on the 26th, was granted, on condition that the company be raised in two weeks. The State at the time was covered with recruiting officers, and competition for men was sharp ; but taking hold with his accustomed vigor, before the fortnight had elapsed, he had his company filled and sworn into the service for three years. He was unanimously elected Captain, and when the field officers came to be selected, a majorship was easily within his reach, but he declined it on the ground that he would rather be in direct command of the men who had joined his company out of friendship to himself, than to hold a higher and easier command where he would be in a measure separated from them. This feeling of mutual friendship continued until the day of his death, and when the news was made known in the company that their old captain was no more, there were few of those bronzed warriors that did not weep bitter tears of regret, or make new vows of vengeance on the rebels who had deprived them of their beloved companion in arms. This feeling of strong attachment grew out of no licence he gave them, for he was a strict disciplinarian, and insisted upon a full compliance with military rules and

orders. But he won their confidence and love by watching over their personal comfort, showing them kindness when sick, preserving their health, defending them against aggressions, and in the hour of battle setting an example of coolness and bravery, but never recklessly rushing them into danger and destruction. By these means he always had the largest, best drilled and most efficient company in the regiment. In acknowledgment of their confidence and esteem, his company presented him on New Year's, 1862, with a handsome sword and a brace of Colt's revolvers.

Refusing to be major at the outset, Gen. Farnsworth made him ranking captain, and it happened that for several months of the summer and fall of 1861 he was in command of the regiment, when he performed the duties of colonel to the satisfaction of his superiors, and established his ability to command.

In October, 1861, "Farnsworth's Big Abolition Regiment," as the 8th Illinois Cavalry was called by the Potomac army, marched passed the White House, 1164 strong, in review by the President. It was composed of unconditional Unionists, who equally hated slavery and rebellion; a better or harder fighting regiment has not gone to the war, nor has any performed more service or inflicted greater damage on the enemy.

The fall of 1861 was spent near Washington, drilling, and the winter in Alexandria, as part of the garrison, where the regiment was constantly in a quarrel with the military governor, Gen. Montgomery, a rebel sympathizer, who took sides with the secesh inhabitants, removed the American flag from houses owned by rebels, and drove off editors of outspoken Union newspapers, and spent his leisure hours in denouncing the Abolitionists as being the cause of the war. With such a man the 8th Illinois could not harmonize. Montgomery succeeded in getting the regiment removed from their comfortable quarters and sent to camp on a low, wet piece of ground some distance beyond Alexandria, where 240 men were soon down with fever from the effect of exposure to rain, snow and knee-deep mud. Thirty-five brave boys died, and Captain Medill, in his letters home, bitterly laments the loss of four of his company—victims of the proslavery malice of Montgomery.

The spring campaign opened early in March, by the sudden and unexpected evacuation of the feared and famous Manassas. An extract from a letter written by the Major, April 19, 1862, may prove interesting:

* * Well, we have actually taken Manassas without firing a shot. Astonishing is it not? For nine months it has stood as a menace and as a stumbling block in the pathway of the army. It was looked upon by many as an earthquake standing ready to swallow up all who might venture too near its yawning mouth. We have been assured by spies, by deserters, by Richmond and New York newspapers, that the country all about Manassas was naturally as impregnable as Gibraltar—that it had been converted into one tremendous fortification; the hill-sides being honey-combed with rifle-pits and covered with masked batteries. On March 10th, we started for the famous stronghold. I will not relate the feelings and talk of the soldiers, except that each considered himself a martyr about to be sacrificed for the sake of his country.

The first day's march brought our regiment within eight miles of the world-renowned stronghold: to-morrow, the great battle would begin! The evening was spent cracking jokes. One said, our march reminded him of the fable in *Æsop*, of the tracks that all led into the sick lion's den—none leading out, and that he expected no tracks of this army would ever lead towards Alexandria. Next morning "boots and saddles" sounded, and forward we started, spread out like a fan as skirmishers, every minute expecting to run against a masked battery, or be blown up by a hidden torpedo or mine. At nine, a halt was ordered. My Lieut., Hynes, who is acting Provost Marshal on Gen. Sumner's staff, galloped up to our regiment and cried out, Manassas was evacuated two days ago, and the rebel army has skedaddled across the Rappahannock! Incredulity was on every man's face, but the messenger declared it was true, and that Gen. McClellan was then occupying Beauregard's headquarters; that the rebels had run off in a panic, that their works of defence were all shams, that Gen. Sumner said that they had not numbered 60,000 men. That we all felt sheepish you may well imagine. Here was an army of almost a quarter of a million held at bay by this handful. For the first time, we began to lose confidence in our commander. All that Lieut. Hynes told us proved true. When we came upon the rebel lines, there was nothing to be seen but an open country, dotted over with little, trifling earthworks. The ditches and breastworks were poor apologies. I leaped my horse over all the obstructions met, with ease.

On the top of a point of ground, where we first came upon the plains of Manassas, was an earthwork, on which the rebels had planted a number of wooden guns. By the way, I observe that some of the New York and Philadelphia papers deny that any wooden cannon were mounted in any of the forts, but I know better. There were a dozen or more in this one fort, as nearly every officer of my regiment can testify, for we handled them.

All the stories you have read about the wonderful strength of Manassas

are *bosh*. I have seen several battle-fields, but never beheld a piece of country in Virginia so favorable for a fair, stand-up, give-and-take fight. The strongest protection the rebels had was the natural banks of Bull Run, a small stream a few yards in width. We could have flanked them on either wing, and crushed them like an egg-shell. Manassas will go down in history as the biggest humbug on record. Any time during the past four months it might have been taken, if our leaders had been as willing to show the way as the soldiers were of following.

We have given this long extract from Major Medill's private correspondence, because it relates to one of the most important events of the war, described by a close and honest observer.

The 8th Illinois and other cavalry were ordered to pursue the retreating rebels to the Rappahannock. The Illinois troops had the advance, and Major Medill (then senior captain) commanded the leading squadron. At Bealton's Station he came upon a battalion of rebel cavalry, drawn up on a hill-side to receive him. The Major promptly brought his front into line, and ordered his squadron to charge. Away they dashed on a gallop, and when within 100 yards, delivered a well directed fire from their carbines. The rebels broke and fled, and then commenced an exciting horse race for several miles. The rebels scattered, and the Major ordered his men to disperse as skirmishers, after them. The pursuit was continued to the Rappahannock, where most of the rebels escaped across a bridge, which they burned as soon as over. The rebel loss was two killed, twenty wounded, and twelve taken prisoners. After this gallant little affair, the Illinois cavalry returned to Alexandria and embarked for Fortress Monroe. Nothing of interest transpired after debarking until the battle of Williamsburg, May 5. From the dense forests that enveloped the battle-field, the cavalry could take no part in the action. After the rebels were defeated, however, the 8th Illinois vigorously pursued the foe in his retreat—the Major's squadron leading. About a thousand prisoners were captured, mainly by the Illinois cavalry. The army of Gen. McClellan moved slowly forward towards Richmond. On the 18th of May, Major Medill was sent out with his battalion on a reconnoissance towards the Chickahominy Creek. He got within 12 miles of Richmond, and had a sharp skirmish with some rebel infantry and cavalry. He captured a

few prisoners and a negro returning to his home from Richmond, who had newspapers of that morning and letters written but a few hours before in Richmond: they described a great panic existing in the rebel capital; the enemy expected that McClellan would march immediately on the city; their army was demoralized; the defenses were defective; the terrified officials were removing the public archives, and no doubt was expressed or entertained but the Federal army could march in and take the place. This information was promptly placed in the hands of Gen. McClellan; but the golden moment was not improved. The battle of Fair Oaks was fought and won, but not followed up. The right wing of the army, under Gen. Porter, took position at Gaines Mill, and went to fortifying; the Illinois cavalry was pushed forward to Mechanicsville, and performed picket duty along the Chickahominy, as far north as Hanover Court House. On two or three occasions the Major pushed his reconnoissances within sight of Richmond. He complains very bitterly in a letter, dated June 17th, of the gross negligence of the regular cavalry under Col. P. St.-G. Cook, for allowing his brother-in-law, Gen. J. E. B. Stewart, to pass through his pickets and lines to the rear of the army, capturing, destroying and burning as he went, and escaping unmolested. Cook exhibited no vigilance or energy, but was never court-martialed, because he was an aristocrat and a regular. He did not start in pursuit for several hours, then took a wrong road, and marched slowly. He says if his regiment had been put in pursuit of Stewart, they would have given a lively chase, and that he never would have had twelve hours' time to build bridges across the Chickahominy on which to escape. In a letter, dated June 25th, he says:

Before this reaches you, the long gathering storm-cloud will break. We have wasted a month here in inaction. Our army is doing two things: ditch digging and dying; the sickness and mortality this hot weather in those marshes are terrible. While our army is wasting away, the enemy is rapidly growing stronger by means of a sweeping conscription. We are 40,000 fewer for duty than we were a month ago, and the rebels are 50,000 stronger than they were a few weeks since. I have just heard that Stonewall Jackson, with 30,000 men, has arrived from the Shenandoah Valley, and taken position on our right, near Hanover Court House. If this be so, a battle may take place at any hour.

I am disgusted at the way this fine army is employed. One part is ditch digging, and another stands guard over the plantations and property of slaveholders, whose sons are in Lee's army, fighting us. Our generals will never put down this Slaveholders' Rebellion by pursuing a proslavery policy. The chief support of the rebellion is derived from the labor of four millions of slaves, who supply the Commissary and Quartermaster's Departments of the enemy, and support the families of the rebel soldiers besides. We must knock away this great pillar of their edifice, else we shall never succeed in putting down the revolt. I am not sanguine of the result of the impending battle; our boys will make a stubborn fight, but McClellan has waited too long. He has neglected his opportunity. Mark my words.

The next day, sure enough, the first of the bloody scenes of seven days' battle began at Mechanicsville; the day after, Gaines Mill was fought and lost, after a long and terrible contest, in consequence of the neglect of the General-in-Chief to reinforce the right wing of his army, which was obliged, for twelve hours, to resist the whole rebel army. The 8th Cavalry, in this battle, did all that was in their power in rallying and returning stragglers to the front, charging on the enemy's flanks, and finally helping to cover the retreat. The Major distinguished himself for coolness and bravery in this as well as in the subsequent operations, until the army found itself at Harrison's Landing, July 2d, 1862.

From that time until September, when the 8th Illinois Cavalry found itself engaged with the enemy in Maryland, there is little personal history to relate. He was much depressed in spirits at the result of the seven days' battles, and fearful of foreign recognition of Confederate independence. He continues, in his letters, to deplore the proslavery spirit and influences that prevailed at the headquarters of the army.

When the army withdrew from the Peninsula, the Major's regiment formed the extreme rearguard—and himself had command of the rearmost squadrons. Not a few slaves found asylum in that regiment as it fell back to Yorktown, and hosts of them owe their deliverance to the Major and his radical troopers, who never let slip a chance to relieve the rebel F. F. V.'s of this very "peculiar" kind of property.

Owing to the sickness of the senior officers, the Major was the ranking officer, and took command of the regiment on its

arrival at Yorktown, and continued in command during all of the subsequent campaign, in which he greatly distinguished himself, frequently receiving the thanks of Gen. Pleasanton, the chief of cavalry.

The 8th Illinois Cavalry reached Alexandria, Sept. 4, 1862, but they had scarcely landed before they were ordered to Washington, and thence marched direct to Rockville, Md. Lee's army had crossed the Potomac after defeating Pope's troops, and occupied Frederick City. The old army of McClellan's was hastily reorganized and united with the bulk of Pope's and Burnside's corps and other troops, and marched at once to prevent Lee from seizing Baltimore. The Major's regiment led the vanguard of this movement, and on the 9th of September became engaged with J. E. B. Stewart's rebel cavalry at Damascus and Tenallytown, beating them in each encounter. Next day a sharp fight took place at New Market, in which the rebel cavalry were severely handled. Soon after, the gallant affair at Boonsboro occurred. The place was held by two regiments of Stewart's cavalry. The Major made a hasty reconnaissance, and concluded he could win. He formed his men, and placing himself at their head, ordered a charge. Away they dashed on a full gallop right into the place, where a hard hand to hand conflict ensued; revolver, sword and pistol were freely used on both sides, but the impetuosity and pluck of the Illinois troopers carried the day, and the discomfited rebels beat a hasty retreat, leaving nearly 200 killed, wounded and prisoners in the hands of the victors, besides all their baggage. The 8th Illinois lost less than forty men in the engagement. In following up the flying foe, a hard fight took place a few miles beyond Boonsboro, at Middleton, in which infantry and artillery were brought up by both sides. The enemy was defeated, and retreated to South Mountain, where a very desperate contest ensued, ending in the defeat of the rebels, in which the Major's regiment took a conspicuous part. The rebels fell back behind Antietam Creek. This was Sept. 15th. On the 17th took place the hard fought battle of Antietam, resulting in the defeat of the rebels. The 8th Illinois, under Major Medill, and the brigade under Gen. Farnsworth, were employed to support

an artillery attack on the centre of the rebel position, in order to relieve Gen. Burnside from a cross-fire that was consuming his men. Those relieving batteries were pushed far forward, and completely silenced the troublesome guns of the enemy. The Major often afterwards said, that if Gen. McClellan had sent forward half of his reserves, under Porter, that lay idle all day, the rebel right wing could easily have been crushed, as it might have been assailed in front and flank at the same moment. McClellan was duly notified of the important heights gained by the artillery and cavalry, but he neglected to improve the tempting opportunity. After the rebels retreated, the Major's regiment, as usual, was in the advance of the pursuit, and picked up a large number of prisoners.

On the 2d of October, the 8th Illinois had an encounter with the rebels, in which the Major exhibited superior strategic as well as fighting qualities. His brigade made a reconnoissance to Martinsburg, Va., into which they dashed and captured a lot of rebels, rescued some Union prisoners, and got a quantity of plunder. There was a large rebel cavalry force under Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, not far off, that entered the place just as the Federal cavalry was leaving it. Gen. Pleasanton placed the 8th Illinois and a battery of flying artillery, both under Major Medill, as the rearguard, which the enemy "pitched into" at once. After a running fight for some distance, the Major left one gun with his rear squadron, and sent the other five pieces forward to a high spot of ground, and had them masked and trained to sweep the road. Meanwhile the rearguard and its gun took up successive positions and skirmished vigorously. The rebels, seeing but one gun, pressed hard after, and tried to capture it by a charge. When they came rushing on headlong to within a couple of hundred yards of the masked battery, the Major gave the signal for his men to clear the road, which was instantly done. Whereupon the whole battery opened with grape, canister and shell right into their column. The result was, that scores of men and horses were piled together on the road in a common destruction. While they were in confusion, the Major ordered his men to ride into the fields along the roadside and pour a volley into their flanks—the Major heading the

charge himself and emptying the contents of his revolver into the broken and flying enemy. The rebel loss was 150 men, including prisoners. The 8th Illinois lost but 16 men. The remainder of the march back to Sharpsburg was unmolested. Gen. Pleasanton highly complimented the Major on the complete success of this piece of strategy, and for the able manner in which he handled the rearguard. It was about this time he was promoted to Major—having previously been senior Captain of his regiment.

It was soon after the occurrence last related, that Gen. J. E. B. Stewart made the famous raid—measuring the circumference of the Potomac army. Several bodies of Federal cavalry were started in pursuit of the contumacious rebels, among others the famous 8th Illinois Cavalry, commanded by the subject of our sketch. The greatest difficulty was to find Stewart's track. The Major was started on the wrong road, and after traveling some twenty-five miles, finally got on the right scent; but the rebels had a long start of him. Away went his troopers and the 3d Indiana Cavalry and their battery of artillery, on the gallop. Night came on, but the pursuit was kept up regardless of the darkness. Over hills and mountains, down into deep valleys, and across creeks and ravines, rode the gallant 8th Illinois and Indiana boys. A cold rain poured down, adding to the gloom and difficulty. The Major seized and pressed native guides to pilot the way. With these, and the light of two tin lanterns, he vigorously pushed ahead. When day broke, he learned that the enemy was at least fifteen miles in advance, and pushing south in the direction of Washington. For twenty-five hours his men had been in the saddle, and neither they nor their horses had eaten a bite. Many of the latter had broken down, and other horses were seized to take their places. A halt for rest and refreshment was ordered of a couple of hours; then "boots and saddles" was sounded, and off went the cavalcade again. The troopers pushed forward as fast as it was possible to urge on their poor jaded brutes. Finally the regiment reached the Monocacy where it empties into the Potomac, just as the rearguard of Stewart's troopers were fording the river and making their escape into Virginia. A few shells were thrown after them, but

the game had escaped ; and what made it the more provoking, within four miles was a strong force of infantry and cavalry that knew of their coming, and could easily have stopped their crossing. The mortification of the Major and his comrades may be imagined, but can hardly be described. In this extraordinary pursuit the 8th Illinois Cavalry rode a distance of 88 miles in thirty-two hours, including all stops and delays. It is needless to say that both men and horse suffered severely.

A few days after this event, the Major obtained a brief furlough to visit his friends in Chicago. He had not been off duty a day for almost fifteen months. On his arrival he was warmly welcomed by his friends and acquaintances. The Mercantile Literary Union, of which he was an active and popular member at the time he joined the army, gave him a generous banquet at the Briggs House, and congratulated him on his promotion, and his prospects of higher military preferment for worthy and gallant conduct. After enjoying the society of friends and relatives for a few days, he hurried back and joined his regiment.

When the army of the Potomac crossed the river and marched to Fredericksburg, the 8th Illinois Cavalry was in the advance, skirmishing all the way there. A month afterwards, the great battle of Fredericksburg was fought and lost. The Major's regiment was an idle spectator of the terrible conflict, and could take no part in the fray. The regiment spent the winter doing picket and scouting duty in the peninsula between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers, where they made themselves a terror to the smugglers and rebel conscript agents. When the 1st of January came, the President's proclamation of freedom to the slaves of rebels went into effect. The Major celebrated that day by taking a battalion of his cavalry, visiting all the plantations for many miles around, and liberating and bringing into camp nearly one thousand "contrabands." The rest of the regiment were not idle, but scouted about the country on similar business. Before nightfall, King George county, where slavery had reigned for 200 years, was free soil !

The Major entered into no service with more alacrity and hearty zest than in giving freedom to the loyal bondsmen of rebels. He did it from motives of humanity for the poor slave,

and for the purpose of weakening the enemy. He contended that from the labor of the slaves the rebels derived their chief strength, and that military policy, to say nothing of humanity, required that they should be deprived of that great support.

Early in the month of May, the 8th Cavalry was divided into three battalions—one under Major Medill, and another under Major Beveridge, and the third under Major Clendenin, and sent down the peninsula between the Potomac and Rappahannock on a scout to break up smuggling, capture guerillas, and drive out the rebel conscript agents. They were gone ten days, during which time they seized an incredible quantity of smugglers' goods, burnt 100 boats of every size, from a schooner down to a dug-out, made a hundred prisoners of guerillas, captured a number of the "conscriptors," and swept Westmoreland, Richmond, Lancaster and Northumberland of able-bodied, adult slaves. When the regiment returned, it brought back a singular train, consisting of scores of wagon loads of contraband goods, droves of cattle, horses and mules, a hundred cut-throat looking prisoners, and over 1500 shouting, singing and praying negroes—some mounted on mules, others on their masters' wagons, and part on foot. As the cavalcade filed through the lines of the army, it was greeted on all sides with loud laughter and louder cheers, at the "grand haul" the Illinois troopers had made from the secesh. Hundreds of the contrabands became soldiers in the Union army, and are proving their right to be free by loyal devotion to the stars and stripes.

The battle of Chancellorsville was fought May 2-3. An important part of Gen. Hooker's plan embraced a great cavalry raid on the rear of the rebel army to destroy their trains, railways and bridges, burn up their army stores, and then sweep down to Richmond and capture it if found to be slightly defended. The plan was well laid, but badly executed. The cavalry was divided into two divisions of 4000 men each, and two batteries of flying artillery to each: one was commanded by Gen. Stoneman, with whom went the 12th Illinois, under Col. Davis; the other division was commanded by Gen. Averill, with whom went the 8th Illinois, under Col. Gamble. The plan was, for the two divisions to cross the Rappahannock some

distance apart, and form a junction at Gordonsville, and thence sweep forward towards Richmond on their grand raid. Meanwhile Gen. Hooker would strike Lee's forces with the main body of his army. Stoneman crossed the Rappahannock, and pushed boldly for Gordonsville. Averill also crossed, and marched timidly forward until he reached a ford on the Rapidan, which was disputed by a couple of rebel regiments with two guns, and there he remained a day and a half, afraid to force his passage across, and then marched back, having accomplished nothing. He remained idle all of the third day within three miles of the left flank of Stonewall Jackson's corps while it was whipping and driving Howard's 11th corps. There that splendid cavalry force lay supine, listening to the roar of the great battle going on within three miles, when, if it had pitched into the rebel flank, there is no doubt but that it would have changed the fate of the day, and converted a bad defeat into a great victory, for such an attack would have been wholly unexpected by the rebels.

Stoneman ascribed the partial failure of his expedition to Averill's bad conduct, and Hooker deprived him of his command. Instead of being dismissed the service, he was sent to Western Virginia and given another command! In speaking of the disgraceful and supine part he and his brave regiment were made to play in the battle of Chancellorsville and the raid on Richmond, the Major always expressed regret and mortification.

Shortly after this time he had a severe attack of bilious fever, aggravated by diarrhoea; but a sound constitution and temperate habits, and his great anxiety to rejoin his regiment, carried him safely through. Lee's army had commenced its famous march on Pennsylvania, and Hooker's cavalry were constantly engaged with the rebel cavalry and picket forces, for the purpose of discovering the enemy's intentions. A hard cavalry fight took place, June 9, near Warrenton Junction, in which Captain Smith and Major Clark were mortally, and Major Forsyth severely, wounded—all officers of the 8th Illinois. When Major Medill heard of the fight, he got up, sick as he was, ordered his horse, and started to join his regiment. The excitement and anxiety to take part in the actions caused his

system to throw off the fever, and enabled him to do duty in a few days. He writes, June 10 :

My sickness has not troubled me half so much as to be left behind my regiment when there is warrior's work to be done. I cannot submit to this fever, and shall mount my horse and join my regiment if it takes two men to hold me on.

Shortly after, he joined the regiment and took part in the desperate cavalry contest at Aldie and Upperville, in which he greatly distinguished himself. On that occasion, the cavalry division of Gen. Buford encountered the rebel cavalry under Gen. Stewart. Col. Gamble's brigade, of which the 8th Illinois was the advance, charged on the rebel force drawn up in front of the Aldie Gap of the Blue Ridge. The 3d Indiana acted as skirmishers, and the 12th Illinois as supports. Early in the fight, Lieut. Col. Clendenin, who commanded the 8th Illinois, had his horse slightly wounded, and retired from the field. Maj. Medill, being next in rank, then took command, and, until the battle was won, behaved with a bravery, a skill and a gallantry that won the admiration of all who witnessed his conduct. In charge after charge he led his men on the rebel ranks, routing and scattering them. His regiment defeated, successively, two Virginia and one North Carolina cavalry regiments. His favorite weapon, in making a charge, was the revolver. He would dash his men right up to the rebel squadrons, who, in the melee, would unhorse scores of them with their sure and deadly six-shooters. He considered a sabre no match for two revolvers in a close encounter either with cavalry or infantry. In this engagement the 8th Illinois lost but 40 men—most of them being wounded by sabre cuts, while they put *hors du combat* over 250 of the enemy, besides capturing 100 prisoners. In the course of the fight, Major Medill captured the commander of the 11th Virginia Cavalry, with which his regiment was engaged at the moment. The incident is thus related by an eye-witness :

While the Major was rallying his men, after one of our charges, I saw, at a short distance over the field, a rebel horseman, with drawn sword, chasing our Sergeant Major, who had got mixed up with the rebels. Major Medill, who happened to be near, put spurs to his big bay horse, and in a few bounds was close to the "reb," who raised his sword aloft and shouted "surrender!" The

Major brought his revolver to an aim, and was in the act of pulling the trigger, when the fellow dropped his sword and cried out, "Don't shoot, I surrender." He saved his life by just a second, as more than one bullet would have lodged in his body the next instant. The prisoner proved to be the Colonel of the 11th Virginia Cavalry, and big enough in a fist fight to have whipped two of our Major; but on the field of battle, size confers but little advantage.

Immediately after this cavalry battle, Gen. Hooker discovered that the rebel army was marching along the opposite side of the Blue Ridge, making for Maryland. He at once put his army on a forced march to head them off. The cavalry brigade, under Col. Gamble, consisting of the 8th and 12th Illinois, 3d Indiana, 8th New York, and a battery, led the advance, and reached Gettysburg on the 30th of June, and immediately charged on two rebel regiments occupying the place and drove them back. Next day, July 1, Buford's division of cavalry (including Gamble's brigade) lay in camp. July 2d, the bloody and terrific battle of Gettysburg began. The rebels advanced early in the morning to the attack. Gen. Reynolds' force—the 1st and 11th corps—did not arrive on the ground until 9 A. M. For the three preceding hours, Buford's cavalry managed to hold the enemy in check by successive and rapid charges on their flanks, compelling them to halt and change line several times, and actually captured quite a number of prisoners, and inflicted on the rebels ten times the damage received. In these brilliant charges, the 8th Illinois was conspicuous for its audacity and success. Major Beveridge led the right—being the ranking officer, and Major Medill the left of the regiment.

After the infantry came up, the 8th Illinois and its brigade were ordered to the left of the line, to prevent a flank movement on the part of the enemy. From that time until the battle ended, the brigade gave the rebel infantry great annoyance, materially retarding his advance, by making frequent, bold dashes at them. In this way, the 8th Illinois saved a whole brigade of infantry and a battery from being captured, by compelling one of the rebel surrounding lines to halt to repel the daring charge of the Illinois troopers, which enabled our infantry brigade and their battery to escape.

After the great battle was over, and the beaten enemy com-

menced their retreat, the two Illinois cavalry regiments began shooting and slashing the rebel rearguard, capturing trains and taking prisoners, until Lee's army stood at bay at Williamsport and Falling Waters. In this pursuit those regiments captured over 2000 prisoners and 800 rebel army wagons, fighting with the enemy's rearguard almost at every mile of the distance.

During this pursuit, the gallant Major pressed on the retreating columns with all his vigor and energy, and looked forward with radiant hope to the moment when the further retreat of the rebels would be stopped by the swollen waters of the Potomac. He felt sanguine that Meade's victorious army would attack without delay the broken and demoralized graybacks, now notoriously short of ammunition and provisions. He believed the campaign was about ending with the total destruction of the invading host, and that the rebellion was on the eve of receiving its death-wound. Full of this belief, he urged on his comrades to strike boldly at the fleeing foe, and give them no rest until they laid down their arms.

On the afternoon of July 6th, the Major's regiment reached the vicinity of the Potomac at Williamsport, and there discovered the rebels engaged in building a bridge over the river to facilitate their escape. The regiment and brigade charged at once on the enemy's pickets and drove them back, capturing a large train of wagons, which were set on fire. Forty or fifty prisoners were also taken. The enemy were found to be in considerable force both of cavalry and infantry; but it was deemed highly important to seize the bridge. A brigade of regulars took position on the right, and the cavalry on the left of the road. Gen. Buford ordered half the 8th Illinois to dismount and go forward as skirmishers. At the time the order was given, Major Medill was attending to some duty at a little distance. On his return, he learned that half of his regiment had gone forward under Capt. Hynes. He at once remarked to Major Beveridge that "a field officer should command the battalion. If you have no objections, I will go." Assent being given, he borrowed a carbine, mounted his horse, and spurred after his men. As soon as he reached them, he stepped in front of the centre and shouted, "Come on, boys;" and away the line swept

through a field on a quick step. At the opposite side of the field, behind a barn and some fences, were stationed a large force of rebel infantry, who opened a heavy fire on the advancing skirmish line. When the field had been more than half crossed, seeing a group of rebels in plain view but a short distance ahead, the Major called on his men near him to give the fellows a volley, and raising his own carbine, took aim. At that instant, a minie ball struck him nearly in the middle of his body, making a frightful hole one and a half inches long by an inch wide, and of unknown depth. The ball passed through the lower edge of the breastbone, and slanting downwards, went through his lung and lodged somewhere near his backbone. He was soon borne from the field to the woods in the rear, and thence on stretchers a few miles to a church, where his wound was examined by the surgeon of the regiment and pronounced mortal. He was next day conveyed to the army hospital at Frederick City, suffering greatly from the motion of the vehicle. Meanwhile, the battle went on until nightfall, neither party gaining much ground, when our men fell back.

Capt. Waite, in a letter to his father, thus writes respecting the Major's fall:

Major Medill went to the front and took charge of the three squadrons of dismounted men fighting as skirmishers. They moved forward at a quick step, and with a "hip," "hip," in the very best of spirits. In a few minutes the sad news came back to us that our noble Major was mortally wounded, and soon after several soldiers came slowly along, bearing in their arms the gallant officer. A ball had entered his breast, and we believed him past recovery. I cannot describe the sadness and gloom which this misfortune cast over the entire regiment and brigade. Officers and men all felt that we had met with a severe loss. The Major had been with us through many a hard fight. His conduct at the late desperate cavalry battle near Aldie, had particularly won for him the confidence and esteem of all the officers and men present. The gallantry, bravery and coolness displayed by the Major on that occasion were very highly spoken of by all. His genial, kind-hearted and generous nature had made him a favorite with the officers of the regiment; while his integrity of character and strict discipline as an officer, had won our confidence and respect. There is not a man in the regiment but mourns his fall.

As soon as he reached the hospital, his friends in Chicago were notified by telegraph of his wound. His eldest brother—

editor of the *Tribune*, hastened to his side, and remained with him till death came. For the third and fourth days after receiving the wound he seemed a little better; the pain had subsided, and he began to feel some hope of ultimate recovery. He conversed freely on all topics; made his will with composure, giving a number of keepsakes to his friends, but bequeathing to his mother the most of his property. On the sixth day, pain and inflammation increasing, he abandoned hope of recovery; but from then until the hour of his death, he exhibited wonderful calmness and fortitude. The same fearless heroism, that had carried him triumphantly through many a fearful contest with his country's foes, stood by him when brought to face the king of terrors, unaided by the excitements of the battlefield and the support of robust health.

His fine physical constitution succumbed but slowly to the destroyer, and enabled him to survive ten days with a wound that would have proved fatal to most men in twenty-four hours. His mind at times was flighty, chiefly from the effects of the opiates administered. Still, he retained his consciousness until within fifteen minutes of his last breath. He expired, without pain or struggle, at 10 o'clock, July 16, 1863, surrounded by a large number of his beloved companions in arms, who wept over their dying comrade as bitter tears as if he had been their nearest of kin.

While the Major lay in the hospital at Frederick, he would constantly inquire whether Meade had yet ordered an attack on Lee's beaten troops. His mind was in a state of feverish anxiety for the assault to begin, lest the enemy would escape across the river. Lee's army, he said, was wholly in our power, and it only required a little daring and enterprise on the part of Meade to capture or kill every rebel composing it. Oh! for Joe Hooker, he would say; if he commanded now, not a rebel would escape.

At last, the bad news was brought to him that the rebels had escaped without a blow being struck at them. He was in agony at the information. "I wish I had not heard it," he exclaimed. "I am going to die without knowing that my country is saved and the slaveholders' accursed rebellion crushed. The capture

of Lee's army would have ended the war in sixty days; now it may drag on for years. It was cowardice or weakness that let the rebels escape." He was greatly consoled, however, by the news that reached him of the capture of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, and the reported fall of Charleston. "Ah!" said he, "blood will tell; it takes the *Western* boys to handle the rebels."

He deplored the hostility to the prosecution of the war evinced by "Northern Copperheads," as he called them, and declared that "there was more danger from a divided North than from both the rebellion and foreign intervention. Let the people of the Free States be united and stand together, and in the end they will triumph over all opposition, and reclaim every seceded State to the Union."

In giving directions concerning his body and funeral, he said that he desired his remains embalmed, and dressed in the full uniform he wore when he fell on the battle-field; that he desired the Rev. Robert Collyer to preach his funeral sermon, because he had declared that the soldier who died to save Liberty and Union, would himself be saved at the judgment-seat of Heaven. He also desired that he should be buried by the Chicago military, and that his remains should repose in Graceland Cemetery, because it was under the control of Thos. B. Bryan, Esq., a true-hearted Union man, and a zealous and devoted friend of the soldier.

His requests were all strictly carried out. His pall-bearers were eight officers of his own rank. His remains were escorted from the depot, on their arrival at Chicago, to the residence of Joseph Medill, Esq., by the Chicago Zouaves, where the last sad rites to the noble hero were performed: they were escorted to the cemetery by a battalion of the 65th Infantry, under Col. McChesney, and the members of the Chicago Typographical Union, of which he had been a respected associate. At the cemetery, six volleys were fired by the escort, and the remains were deposited in the receiving vault.

Our narrative is ended. We have hastily traced the career of one of the martyr heroes that Illinois has given for the salvation of the Union, and in the long roll, no nobler, braver, or truer patriot has sealed his devotion to his country by his heart's

blood. He was an ardent, thorough devotee of Liberty; his whole soul was in the holy cause of Union. Every energy of his nature was bent to the accomplishment of the success of the great cause. He was as fearless as his own sword, and as cool in the battle as on parade; he set an example of gallantry, honor and integrity that won for him the esteem and confidence of all his companions, without incurring the envy or jealousy of any. We but reiterate the unanimous voice of his beloved regiment, the brave, old 8th Illinois Cavalry, in ascribing to him great executive ability as an officer wherever he had an opportunity to exhibit it, and in making the sad prediction that, had he lived, he would have won his way to high station and reputation in the army. He fell in the morn of life, full of promise—a courteous gentleman, a whole-souled patriot, and a brave soldier.

TESTIMONIAL FROM MAJ. GEN. PLEASANTON.

The following letter from Major General Pleasanton, bearing testimony to the worth and bravery of the late Major Medill, addressed to the brother of the deceased, may be gratifying to the numerous friends of that gallant officer. The writer is the able and popular commander-in-chief of the cavalry arm of the Potomac army.

HEADQUARTERS CAVALRY CORPS,
ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, December 13, 1863. }

JOSEPH MEDILL, Esq., Chicago, Illinois:

MY DEAR SIR: My varied duties have heretofore prevented the accomplishment of a long cherished desire on my part to communicate with you in reference to the death of your brother, Major W. H. Medill, of the 8th Illinois Cavalry. He received a fatal wound while fighting most gallantly in front of our lines on the Antietam River, after having passed through the Gettysburg battle and campaign with honor to himself and to his regiment. I deeply felt his loss, not only to the service, but as a friend and companion.

Having been under my command during the past eighteen months, I had many opportunities of observing his fine abilities. His coolness, clear judgment and quick decision had already distinguished him on many occasions, and the future was fast opening to him a brilliant career, when his life was closed by a rebel shot.

One remembrance occurs to me that it may not be out of place to mention. It was a year ago last October, when, with eight hundred cavalry and a battery of artillery, I started for Martinsburg, Va., to find myself opposed by four thousand rebel cavalry and two batteries. Your brother, the Major, commanded my advance. We fought our way through to Martinsburg, inflicting a heavy loss on the enemy; and the Major showed so much intelligence, sagacity and military skill throughout the day, as to command my highest admiration.

I cannot do justice to the memory or the service of your brother in a communication of this kind; but I feel that some testimony of my appreciation of him might not be unacceptable unto you, more especially of our friendly attachment.

Trusting I may have the good fortune to meet you hereafter, and with the assurance of my warmest sympathies in your afflicting bereavement, I remain, very respectfully and truly yours,

A. PLEASANTON, Major General.

RESOLUTIONS OF RESPECT.

At a meeting of the Mercantile Literary Union of Chicago, held on the 25th of July, 1863, to take into consideration the decease of Major W. H. Medill, of the 8th Illinois Cavalry Regiment, occasioned by wounds received in the pursuit of the rebels after the battle of Gettysburg, Pa., the following resolutions were adopted:

Resolved, That by the death of our late friend and associate, Major W. H. Medill, our Society has lost an active and efficient member, the community a worthy and energetic citizen, our country a brave soldier and pure patriot, and his sorrowing relations a warm friend and affectionate companion.

Resolved, That we regard our departed friend as another sacrifice offered upon our country's altar, whose precious blood will assist in quenching the burning fires of rebellion and in re-uniting the bonds of our glorious Union.

Resolved, That we deeply feel for those who are more nearly affected by this sad bereavement, and that we tender to them our heartfelt sympathy, hoping that they may be sustained in this their great trial by the memory of the glorious death of the departed, and the precious promises of the Christian religion.

Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be presented to the family of the deceased, and that they be published in the daily papers of the city and entered upon the records of this Society.

The Chicago Typographical Union, No. 16, met on Saturday evening, July 25, 1863, at their hall, and passed the following preamble and resolutions :

WHEREAS, The Divine Ruler of the Universe has in his infinite wisdom called unto Himself, from the patriot army of the Potomac, Major W. H. Medill, one of its bravest and most honored officers; and whereas, the said Major W. H. Medill, before the breaking out of this wicked rebellion, was a fellow craftsman and member of this organization, respected for his manly worth, integrity and skill, loved for his pure, disinterested patriotism and great moral worth; and since his connection with the defenders of the Union, honored for his bravery alike by us and other loyal citizens; and though our hearts are full of sorrow, we deem it a duty we owe the departed hero to publicly express our sympathy to his relatives, friends and brother soldiers, in common with us mourning the loss of him whose achievements gave such glorious promise for the future. Therefore, as a further tribute of respect, be it

Resolved, That to his bereaved and sorrowing parents, brothers, sisters and other loved ones, we would, in this their time of mourning, tender our sympathies, and assure them that if their sorrow is deeper, it cannot be more heartfelt and sincere than ours. That though his place on earth is forever vacant, his memory will be kept green in the hearts of his brother craftsmen of Chicago.

Resolved, That in the death of Major W. H. Medill, the Chicago Union has lost one of its most valued members—a printer, patriot, friend and Union man.

Resolved, While with the 8th Illinois Cavalry we lament the loss of Major Medill and other of their brave comrades, so many of whom have “fallen with their faces to heaven, their feet to the foe.” we would send to them words of cheer and consolation; and if, in the providence of God, further sacrifices are demanded from their shattered ranks, let the remembrance of past heroic deeds of them and their gallant leader gone, fire their hearts anew and nerve their strong arms to fresh deeds of daring, to avenge their losses and make secure forever the salvation of the Republic; and if any of them should fall, may they have the pleasure that attended the last hours of our friend, of knowing that victory, to them as it was to him, is their reward, and that death is but promotion to the army of sainted patriots.

Resolved, That this Union continue to wear the usual badge of mourning for thirty days.

Be it further Resolved, That Capt. D. J. Hynes, one of the several honorary members of this Union now connected with the 8th Illinois Cavalry, on his return to the regiment, be authorized to convey these resolutions to them, and to assure them that we, as citizens, sympathize with them in their sorrows and glory in their victories.

Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be presented to the relatives of the deceased, and also that they be published in the Chicago papers.









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